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BOX PATENT APPLICATION

Assistant Commissioner for Patents
Washington, D.C. 20231

Attorney Docket Number:
4889:62

RE: New U.S. Patent Application
Applicant: Leamon, et al.
Filing Date: December 17, 1999
For: **METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR EMPLOYEE WORK
SCHEDULING**

Dear Sir:

Transmitted herewith for filing are the following:

- ☒ Patent Application (11 pages), Claims (6 pages), and Abstract (1 page);
- ☒ Informal Drawings (3 sheets);
- ☒ Check in the amount of \$760.00 for Basic Filing Fees (18 total claims, 2 independent claims);
- ☒ Declaration and Power of Attorney (unexecuted);
- ☒ Assignment (unexecuted); and
- ☒ A self-addressed, stamped postcard to be returned to sender.

Respectfully submitted,

HUGHES & LUCE, L.L.P.

By:

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December 17, 1999

METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR EMPLOYEE WORK SCHEDULING**Related Applications**

This application claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Application No. 60/112,671, filed December 17, 1998.

5 Technical Field

The present invention relates generally to computerized systems and methods for planning, scheduling and managing personnel in an environment in which there is a varying workload by time of day and by day of week to be staffed with a variable number of agents having varying preferences.

Background Of The Invention

Force management systems for use in planning, scheduling and managing personnel in a telephone call center are known in the prior art. Such systems typically include a basic planning capability to enable a call center supervisor to forecast future call loads and the number of agents necessary to service that load. Most prior art systems also include a simple scheduling capability which then functions to allocate agent work hours according to the staffing requirements that have been forecast. Agents are then manually or automatically assigned to fill the schedules. These systems usually also include other administrative and reporting capabilities.

An improved method and system to provide planning and scheduling is shown in Castonguay et al. (U.S. Patent No. 5,911,134), which is assigned to the assignee of this application

and incorporated herein by reference. This system provides an excellent system for automatically developing schedules to meet work flow needs. However, the system of Castonguay et al. fails to provide schedules that take into account the agent's preferences, seniority or other key criteria. It would therefore be desirable to overcome the problems associated with such prior art force management systems.

Brief Summary of the Invention

It is an object of the invention to provide a force management system that accurately reflects the agents' preferences and seniority.

5 It is an additional object of the invention to provide a system that most closely fits the agent's priorities regarding their preferences so that the most valued preference is most likely to be fulfilled.

10 In one basic embodiment of the invention, these and other objects of the invention are provided in a method for assigning a group of agents to a plurality of available schedules, comprising determining preferences for a plurality of factors for each agent. Each agent provides an order of importance for the plurality of factors. For each factor, a difference value for that factor between a preliminarily assigned schedule (or pool of unassigned schedules) and each agent's preference for that factor is determined. The difference values for each factor are assigned to a vector for each agent wherein the factor having the highest importance is assigned to the highest order bits of the vector and the remaining factors are assigned to subsequent orders of bits in their assigned order of importance. Then, for each agent, a vector for each schedule not assigned to that agent is determined. Vectors for every other agent are also calculated for every schedule swap involving the current agent, including
20 schedule swaps of specific factors within schedules. The
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schedule having the lowest vector is then assigned for each agent. Preferably, the process of assigning schedules is performed beginning with the highest ranked agent and repeated for the next highest ranked agent until all agents have been
5 processed.

The foregoing has outlined some of the more pertinent features of the present invention. These should be construed to be merely illustrative of some of the more prominent features and applications of the invention. Many other beneficial results can
0 be attained by applying the disclosed invention in a different manner or by modifying the invention as will be described. Accordingly, a fuller understanding of the invention may be had by referring to the following Detailed Description of the Preferred Embodiment.

Brief Description of the Drawings

For a more complete understanding of the present invention and the advantages thereof, reference should be made to the following Detailed Description taken in connection with the
5 accompanying drawings in which:

FIG. 1 is a representation of scheduling parameters screen;

FIG. 2 is a representation of a portion of the agent preferences screen;

FIG. 3 is a chart show the structure of the preference fit
10 vector; and

FIG. 4 is a flowchart showing the preference fit process.

Similarly referenced characters refer to similar parts or steps throughout the several views of the drawings.

Detailed Description

As described above, the force management system of the present invention is adapted for planning, scheduling and managing personnel in an environment in which there is a varying workload by time of day and by day of week to be staffed with a variable number of agents. In general, the agents will be required to respond to an event load which has been forecast to occur in the future. One such environment is a telephone call center in which, for example, an "event" is an incoming call to the center. For the remainder of the description, the telephone call center environment is described only for exemplary purposes and not by way of limitation. The present invention is applicable to scheduling of a work group in any field. For example, a team of technicians providing technical support to computer owners via e-mail may advantageously apply the present invention.

To meet the varying schedule needs, schedules are initially assigned using a known system such as that described in copending U.S. patent application to Crockett et al., Serial No. 08/890,228, which is incorporated herein by reference. Briefly, a computer database is generated including the skills, number and other criteria of the workforce. The work flow is modeled to generate a schedule of work needs. The criteria of the agents are then matched to the work needs in a "best fit" manner using a

computer algorithm. In an alternative embodiment, a pool of unassigned schedules may be generated.

Preferably, the method and system of the present invention are implemented in a client-server environment where the agent
5 and work flow databases reside on network servers and are accessible via a network to client computers on the desks of agents and managers. Many suitable computing platforms and network systems are available on the market.

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Once the preliminary schedules are generated, they must be adjusted to account for the agents' preferences and the priority in which they hold those preferences. A default preference order is entered into the system by managers using screen **130**, which is shown in **FIG. 1**. The potential preferences shown are: number of days worked **132**, days off pattern **134**, number of days for particular tour group member **136**, which days of the week are worked for a particular tour group member **138**, tour start times **140** and start time consistency **142**. These particular preferences should not be considered as limiting the scope of the invention. Any criteria may be advantageously accounted for using the method
20 and system of the present invention.

Priorities of the preferences are established by rank ordering the preferences and entering the ranking in screen **130**. These default priorities may be overridden for each agent by management using screen **170** of **FIG. 2**. The rank ordered

priorities are entered by management into column **172**. In addition, portions of the preference screen that are not shown allow management to enter specific preferences for each agent, such as start times, break times, lunch times, days off, end
5 time, lunch length, split shift parameters and hours worked by accessing tabs **173**.

After initial schedule generation using a process such as that of Crockett et al., there are inevitably individual schedules that meet the management unit and tour (workshift)
10 criteria, but only meet a subset of the agent's preferences. Ideally, the schedules are either wholly or partially swapped and/or are adjusted to meet each agent's preferences and priorities as closely as possible.

A numerical value representing how each set of schedules
15 fit's each agent's preference factors are compiled into a multi-word vector **174** as shown in **FIG. 3**. Each type of preference is assigned a bit range within the vector. The bits used in each range represent the difference (or absolute value of the difference) between the assigned schedule and the preferred
20 schedule for each preference. For daily values, the bits assigned represent the sum of the differences for each day of the week. Where an agent has a list of preferences, the difference will be defined specifically for each type of preference. Where an agent has no preferences, the "difference" will be defined
25 specifically for each type of preferences.

The order of the bit ranges is determined by the priority ranking list provided by the agent or by default. The highest priority is assigned to highest order bit range **176**. The lowest priority is assigned to lowest order bit range **178**. The other priorities are place in the intervening bit ranges in order of priority. In this manner, each agent has a vector **174** that can be calculated for any schedule indicating a prioritized fit of that schedule for that agent.

The vector fit of the agents in a management unit are then processed to provide the best vector fit using the process of **FIG. 4**. Assigned schedules or a pool of unassigned schedules are provided using a process such as that of Crockett et al. in step **180**. The agents are then ranked for processing of their schedules according to a priority system. The most common system for prioritizing processing is seniority. This embodiment will use seniority as the agent ranking scheme, but its use should not be construed as limiting the scope of the invention. Other ranking systems such as performance based systems may be used.

The process begins by making the highest ranked agent, in this example the most senior agent, the current agent for the process **181**. A vector for the current agent is then calculated for every schedule. In addition, vectors for all other agents are calculated for every schedule. These procedures are shown at step **182**. In addition to entire schedules, preferences within schedules may be swapped for both the current agent and all other

agents to provide a closer fit. For example, an agent may have certain days off as a high priority. The system may swap particular days off to provide a schedule having a minimized vector of that agent. For each schedule assigned and for
5 schedules with partial swaps, a vector is calculated for the current agent and all other agents. If a schedule is found where the current agent's vector is lower, the schedule is assigned to the current agent, unless the schedule is assigned to a higher ranked agent. If multiple schedules are found with lower
10 vectors, the schedule with the lowest vector is assigned to the current agent as shown at step **184**, unless the schedule is assigned to a higher ranked agent. Swapping may still occur with a higher ranked agent, but the criteria for such a swap is more stringent. A swap with a higher ranked agent can only be done if a swap can be found that will decrease the lower ranked agent's
15 vector without increasing the vector of the higher ranked agent as shown at step **185**. A pointer is then incremented to set the agent having the next highest ranking as the current agent at step **186**. The process then determines if all agents have been
20 processed at step **188**. If not, the process is repeated for the next highest ranked agent. If all agents have been processed, the process is complete **190**.

It should be appreciated by those skilled in the art that the specific embodiments disclosed above may be readily utilized
25 as a basis for modifying or designing other structures for

carrying out the same purposes of the present invention. It should also be realized by those skilled in the art that such equivalent constructions do not depart from the spirit and scope of the invention as set forth in the appended claims.

Claims

1. A method for assigning a group of agents to a plurality of available schedules, comprising the steps of:

determining preferences for a plurality of factors for each agent;

assigning an order of importance for the plurality of factors for each employee;

for each factor, determining a difference value between a plurality of schedules and each agent's preference for that factor;

assigning the difference value for each factor to an assigned vector for each agent wherein the factor having the highest importance is assigned to the highest order bits of the vector and the remaining factors are assigned to subsequent orders of bits in their assigned order of importance;

for each agent, calculating an unassigned vector for each schedule not assigned to the agent;

assigning the schedule having the lowest vector to each agent.

2. The method of Claim 1 wherein unassigned vectors are calculated for each agent based on the assigned schedules and based on schedules where selected factors are swapped between schedules.

3. The method of Claim 1 wherein the unassigned vectors are first calculated for a highest ranked agent and the schedule having the lowest vector is assigned to the highest ranked agent, and further including the steps of:

5 (a) determining the lowest vector for the next highest ranked agent,

(b) repeating step a until each agent's schedule has been compared to every other agent's schedule.

4. The method of Claim 3 wherein the agents are ranked according to seniority.

5. The method of Claim 3 wherein the agents are ranked according to performance.

6. The method of Claim 3 wherein a schedule may only be assigned from a higher ranked agent to a lower ranked agent if such assignment will decrease the lower ranked agent's vector without increasing the vector of the higher ranked agent.

7. The method of Claim 1 wherein the plurality of factors is selected from the group of start times, break times, lunch times, days off, end time, lunch length, split shift parameters and hours worked.

8. The method of Claim 1 wherein the plurality of schedules are preliminarily assigned schedules.

9. The method of Claim 1 wherein the plurality of
5 schedules are a pool of schedules.

10. A computer program product for operation on a computer for assigning a group of agents to a plurality of available schedules, comprising:

means for determining preferences for a plurality of factors
5 for each agent;

means for assigning an order of importance for the plurality of factors for each agent;

means, for each factor, for determining a difference value between a preliminarily assigned schedule and each agent's
10 preference for that factor;

means for assigning the difference value for each factor to an assigned vector for each agent wherein the factor having the highest importance is assigned to the highest order bits of the vector and the remaining factors are assigned to subsequent
15 orders of bits in their assigned order of importance;

means, for each agent, for calculating an unassigned vector for each schedule not assigned to the agent;

means for assigning the schedule having the lowest vector to each agent.

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11. The product of Claim 10 wherein the means for calculating unassigned vectors calculates unassigned vectors for each agent based on the schedules not assigned to the agent and based on schedules where selected factors are swapped between
25 schedules.

12. The product of Claim 10 wherein the unassigned vectors are first calculated for a highest ranked agent and the schedule having the lowest vector is assigned to the highest ranked agent, and further including:

(a) means for determining the lowest vector for a next highest ranked agent,

(b) means for repeatedly applying said means for determining the lowest vector until each agent's schedule has been compared to every other agent's schedule.

13. The method of Claim 12 wherein the agents are ranked according to seniority.

14. The method of Claim 12 wherein the agents are ranked according to performance.

15. The product of Claim 12 wherein a schedule may only be assigned from a higher ranked agent to a lower ranked agent if such assignment will decrease the lower ranked agent's vector without increasing the vector of the higher ranked agent.

16. The product of Claim 10 wherein the plurality of factors is selected from the group of start times, break times,

lunch times, days off, end time, lunch length, split shift
parameters and hours worked.

17. The method of Claim **10** wherein the plurality of
5 schedules are preliminarily assigned schedules.

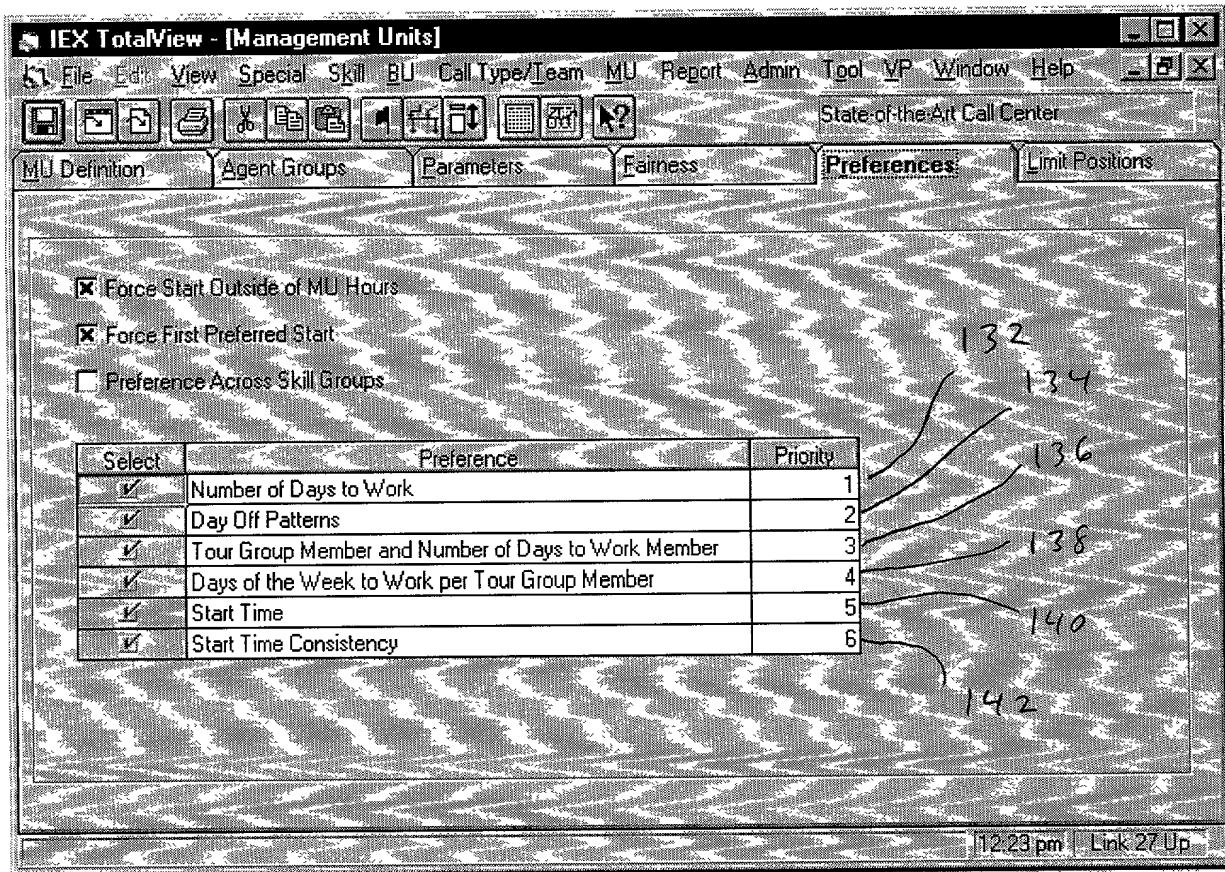
18. The method of Claim **10** wherein the plurality of
schedules are a pool of schedules.

METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR EMPLOYEE WORK SCHEDULING

Abstract

In one basic embodiment of the invention, a method for assigning a group of agents to a plurality of available
5 schedules, comprising determining preferences for a plurality of factors for each agent. Each agent provides an order of importance for the plurality of factors. For each factor, a difference value for that factor between a preliminarily assigned schedule (or pool of unassigned schedules) and each agent's
10 preference for that factor is determined. The difference values for each factor are assigned to a vector for each agent wherein the factor having the highest importance is assigned to the highest order bits of the vector and the remaining factors are assigned to subsequent orders of bits in their assigned order of
15 importance. Then, for each agent, a vector for each schedule not assigned to that agent is determined. Vectors for every other agent are also calculated for every schedule swap involving the current agent, including schedule swaps of specific factors within schedules. The schedule having the lowest vector is then
20 assigned for each agent. Preferably, the process of assigning schedules is performed beginning with the highest ranked agent and repeated for the next highest ranked agent until all agents have been processed.

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FIG. 1

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Agent Preferences

Preferences Start Times Lunch Times Days Off Fairness Custom

☒ Use Custom Preference Priority

Select	Preference	Priority
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Number of Days to Work	1
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Day Off Patterns	2
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Tour Group Member and Number of Days to Work Member	3
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Days of the Week to Work per Tour Group Member	4
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Start Time	5
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Start Time Consistency	6

170

173

172

FIG. 2

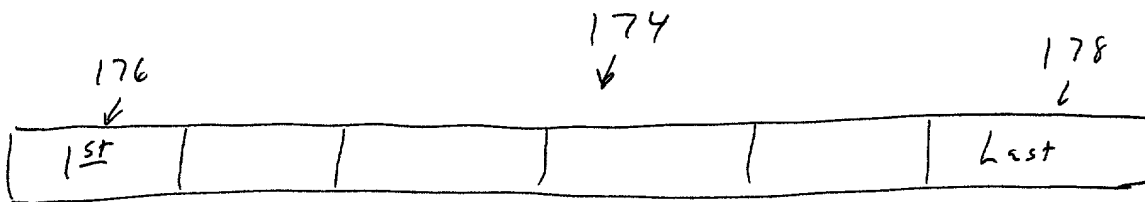


Fig. 3

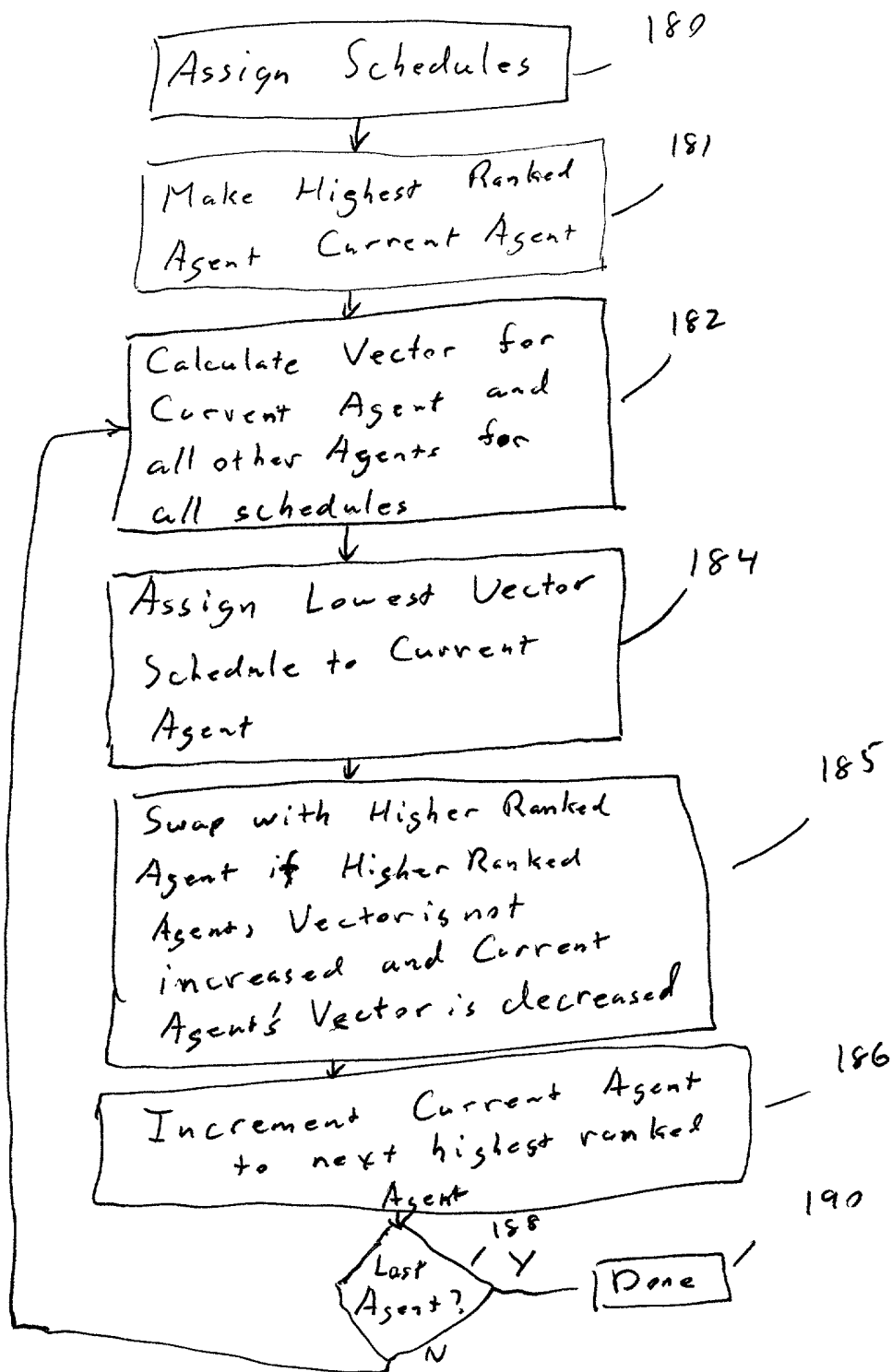


FIG. 4

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**DECLARATION AND POWER OF ATTORNEY FOR
PATENT APPLICATION**

As a below named inventor, I hereby declare that:

My residence, post office address and citizenship are as stated below next to my name;

I believe I am the original, first and sole inventor (if only one name is listed below) or an original, first and joint inventor (if plural names are listed below) of the subject matter which is claimed and for which a patent is sought on the invention entitled:

METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR EMPLOYEE WORK SCHEDULING

the specification of which (check one):

- ☒ is attached hereto.
- ☐ was filed on _____;
as Application Serial No. _____
and which was amended on _____ (if applicable)

I hereby state that I have reviewed and understand the contents of the above identified specification, including the claims, as amended by any amendment referred to above.

I acknowledge the duty to disclose information which is material to the patentability of this application in accordance with Title 37, Code of Federal Regulations, §1.56.

I hereby claim foreign priority benefits under Title 35, United States Code, §119 of any foreign application(s) for patent or inventor's certificate listed below and have also identified below any foreign application for patent or inventor's certificate having a filing date before that of the application on which priority is claimed:

Prior Foreign Application(s):	Priority Claimed
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <div>_____ (Number)</div> <div>_____ (Country)</div> <div>_____ (Day/Month/Year)</div> </div>	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <div>___ Yes</div> <div>___ No</div> </div>

I hereby claim the benefit under Title 35, United States Code, §120 of any United States application(s) listed below and, insofar as the subject matter of each of the claims of this application is not disclosed in the prior United States application in the manner provided by the first paragraph of

004889.00062:485486.01

Title 35, United States Code, §112, I acknowledge the duty to disclose information material to the patentability of this application as defined in Title 37, Code of Federal Regulations, §1.56 which occurred between the filing date of the prior application and the national or PCT international filing date of this application:

<u>60/112,671</u>	<u>December 17, 1998</u>	<u>Pending</u>
(Application Serial #)	(Filing Date)	(Status)

I hereby declare that all statements made herein of my own knowledge are true and that all statements made on information and belief are believed to be true; and further that these statements were made with the knowledge that willful false statements and the like so made are punishable by fine or imprisonment, or both, under Section 1001 of Title 18 of the United States Code and that willful false statements may jeopardize the validity of the application or any patent issued thereon.

POWER OF ATTORNEY: As a named inventor, I hereby appoint the following attorneys and/or agents to prosecute this application and transact all business in the Patent and Trademark Office connected therewith.

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